SCIENCE & GOVERNMENT REPORT

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ERDA Hires National Academy for Vast Energy Study

Having been embarrassed out of its traditional role as towel boy for nuclear power advocates, the National Academy of Sciences has re-entered the arena with plans for a $2-million study to be performed by a newly created Committee on Nuclear Power and Alternative Energy Systems. NAS President Philip Handler describes the study as "perhaps the most important and complex the Academy has ever undertaken" — which covers some ground for a 112-year-old organization.

Since expert studies for government agencies are what the Academy was created to perform, its newest plunge into the nuclear controversy is perfectly in order. And since the venerable institution has tardily fallen in step with the current fashion of letting the "people" in on the complexities of technology and public affairs, the new study will be characterized by an openness that was unheard of at the NAS just a few years ago.

But with all respect for the virtues of rationality and expertise, the fact of the matter is that the controversies concerning the safety and economics of nuclear power have regrettably passed far beyond the point where yet another study is going to make any significant difference. The reason, quite simply, is that any study must conclude that the risks of nuclear power are at least infinitesmal, and once that is on the record, the anti's will have another ration of red meat. And if the study concludes that nuclear power is a dangerous but containable technology, no volume of calculations will wash out the public impact of acknowledgement of danger.

As things now stand, the only possibility of the report being influential would be if it comes out hard against nuclear power, for then the opponents of atomic energy would quickly embrace the prestigious Academy and broadcast its conclusions to the world. But such an outcome is so unlikely as to be inconceivable. Even in its new dress, the National Academy of Sciences is not a killer of big technologies.

The study, which Handler announced on November 18, is to be performed under contract to the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), which, as nuclear legatee of the disbanded Atomic Energy Commission, is plunging full speed ahead with the development of atomic power. The inspiration for yet another expert inquiry was not stated by either Handler or ERDA, but the troubles of atomic energy are plainly visible and it may be assumed that ERDA is looking for help rather than wisdom.

Lessened power demand and high capital costs have led electric utilities throughout the country to back off from plans for nuclear power; meanwhile, with California setting the pace, more than a dozen states will hold referenda in November 1976 on propositions

(Continued on Page 2)

In Brief

With his 906-page *Commissioner's Report* drawing almost nothing but boos (SGR Vol. V, No. 20), FDA Commissioner Alexander Schmidt is now conceding that the drug industry sometimes falls short of pure virtue. FDA procedures, he told a recent meeting, are "complicated repeatedly by industry representatives setting up unproductive meetings, offering no agendas for those meetings and then shopping around the agency for partial opinions as levers to advance the industry position."

The scientific community has been added to the list of organizations that have been denied a ceremonial nod by California's Governor Brown. When asked by the American Chemical Society to proclaim a "Chemistry Week" in connection with the ACS annual meeting there next August, Brown refused on the grounds that the gesture is meaningless.

After much study, NSF has figured out the role that science will play in the Bicentennial observation. At a cost of $700,000, three scholarly forums will be held "to achieve a better understanding of our knowledge needs for the next quarter century." The forums will be videotaped, casseted, etc., and shipped to regional forums where ordinary folks will be invited to look in and participate. Costs will be shared by NSF, the Bicentennial Commission, and Xerox, whose horror-modern campus at Leesburg, Va., is described as the "home" for this venture.

Latest member of Congress to grab for publicity by ridiculing research titles is Senator William Roth (R-Del.), whose gimmick is a "Federal Frill Award" to be awarded for "the least vital government grant of 1975" — which is appropriate enough from one of the least vital members of the US Senate.

. . . Energy Study: "Full Spectrum of Opinion" Included

(Continued from Page 1)

that would restrict nuclear operations to the point of making them virtually impossible. In such circumstances, a call for an Academy study is as commonplace as a fourth down punt.

It is to be expected that the anti's, with their suspicions justifiably aroused by past loadings of Academy committees, will pick over the biographies of the 16-18 persons who will make up the nuclear study group, and find a good deal to be suspicious about. In anticipation of this, Handler's announcement of the study states, "We are aware of the polarization of attitudes on nuclear energy among the public and in the scientific community as well. Accordingly, a committee (see box for those named so far) has been selected that not only contains a broad range of competence but also represents the full spectrum of opinion surrounding this controversial issue."

Just how "full" that spectrum is remains to be seen, since the committee is not yet complete, but if public confidence is a major object of the study, it is noticeable that the present list does not include any of the more outspoken opponents of nuclear power.

As for the scope of the committee's inquiry, the Academy announcement states that it is to include "a comprehensive and reliable analysis of the energy problem and the options that accompany it. . . .The study will look at the consequences of various strategies for developing alternative energy resources in the face of declining oil and gas supplies and rising demands for energy. . . .Concerning itself with a 35-year time span, the study will deal with all aspects of nuclear power systems and fuel cycles including safety, economics, reliability, and environmental acceptability in comparing the alternative techniques. It will assess what is known and identify the research and development needed to permit timely energy policy decisions to be made.

"The study will focus on the prospects for the various nuclear power options, particularly the breeder reactor, and compare them with other energy systems—such as liquid and gaseous fuels produced from coal and solar, geothermal, and fusion energy.

(Continued on Page 3)

Academy Lists Membership of Nuclear Power Study Group

Following are the members that so far have been appointed to the Committee on Nuclear Power and Alternative Energy Systems of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences:

Co-chairman: Harvey Brooks, former dean of engineering and applied physics, now professor of technology and public policy, Harvard; Edward L. Ginzton, chairman of the board, Varian Associates.

Members:

Stephen D. Bechtel, Jr., chairman, Bechtel Group of Companies, San Francisco;

Kenneth E. Boulding, professor of economics, Institute of Behavioral Sciences, University of Colorado;

Robert H. Cannon, Jr., chairman, division of engineering and applied science, California Institute of Technology;

Richard R. Doell, research geophysicist, U.S. Geological Survey;

Otis Dudley Duncan, professor of sociology, University of Arizona;

Edward J. Gornowski, executive vice president, Exxon Research and Engineering Co., Florhan Park, New Jersey;

John P. Holdren, associate professor, energy and resources program, University of California, Berkeley;

Hendrik S. Houthakker, Henry Lee professor of economics, Harvard University;

Henry L. Kohn, Gaiser professor of radiation biology, Harvard Medical School;

Stanley Lewand, vice president and division executive, public utilities division, Chase Manhattan Bank, N.Y.;

John C. Neess, associate professor of zoology, University of Wisconsin;

David Rose, professor of nuclear engineering, MIT;

David Sive, attorney, Winer, Neuberger, and Sive, New York City;

Bernard I. Spinrad, professor of nuclear engineering, Oregon State University.

The staff director is Jack M. Hollander, former director of the energy and environment division of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory at the University of California.

Kennedy Bill Seeks Aid for Public Interest Organizations

With philanthropic support for some public interest law groups drying up, and Congressional enthusiasm for a Consumer Protection Agency on the wane, attention should be paid to a bill introduced on November 20 by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.).

The bill (S 2715) would enable public interest groups which take part in regulatory proceedings, or which take the federal government to court, to recoup some expenses, such as the costs of lawyers and expert witnesses. The measure could open up a potentially life-saving source of funds for some groups.

Kennedy suggested last week that the bill would provide a counter weight to the lavishly funded industrial presence in federal regulatory proceedings. Participation by the public in such proceedings "has been severely impaired by the enormously high cost of participation," he said.

The bill replaces a more limited measure, introduced by Kennedy earlier this year (SGR Vol. V, No. 10), which would provide cash aid to intervenors in regulatory procedures of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. It would apply to all regulatory agencies of the federal government, and it is designed to answer a recent Supreme Court ruling which effectively bars the award the legal fees to public interest groups which successfully challenge government regulations and decisions in court, unless Congress specifically authorizes such a procedure (SGR Vol. V, No. 11).

To be eligible for financial support, a public interest group would have to demonstrate to the agency that it could make a substantial contribution to the proceeding, that it lacks the resources to take part, and that it would not benefit economically from the outcome. The measure would therefore give agencies considerable latitude in deciding who should receive financial support.

Similarly, the bill would allow the courts considerable discretion in deciding if legal fees should be awarded in court cases brought against the government. The chief criterion would be whether or not the court action "served an important public interest."

The bill authorizes $10 million for FY 1976, but it does not state how the money should be divided among

(Continued on Page 4)

ENERGY *(Continued from Page 2)*

The committee will also address the problem of socio-economic effects of various mixes of energy technologies and of strategies for energy-demand management. Collateral studies underway in the NRC [Nuclear Regulatory Commission] and elsewhere will be used to assist the new committee, and a series of especially qualified technical panels are now being created to assist in the conduct of the studies."

In line with the openess technique that the Academy was perhaps last to adopt among all major institutions on the American landscape, public meetings will be held in January in San Francisco, Denver, Minneapolis, New York City, and Atlanta so that, as Handler is quoted in the announcement, "at the very outset of this study, we will have essential input from interested groups and citizens around the country." Dates and locations of the meetings are to be announced.

An initial report is scheduled to be delivered to ERDA next December, and the final report is due in June, 1977.

Assuming that the study will be competent and disinterested — which is a fair assumption since the Academy can no longer easily get away with playing patsy for federal agencies — there is a matter of regret to be noted. It is that as recently as five years ago, the Academy could have played a useful role in laying out for public consideration the benefits and menaces of atomic energy. It chose, instead, to take its signals from the daddy-knows-best promoters at the AEC. Now that the Academy has gone straight and public and is concerned about its reputation for rectitude, its findings on this subject will merit respectful attention. But passion and profitability are now the dominant forces in the nuclear controversy and though the Academy may be enroute to deserving the respect that it craves, its contribution to this issue will probably arrive too late to be of much use.—DSG

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Contributing Editors
Colin Norman, Pamela Moore

Editor and Publisher
Daniel S. Greenberg

Circulation Manager
Alice Anne Freund

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Health, Behavioral Research: A Flareup of Interest. . .

There is a new flirtation underway between government and the behavioral sciences, with the mutual interest this time being the role that research can play in persuading the citizenry to moderate or abandon self-destructive health habits.

The situation is characterized by a good deal of confusion and confessed scientific uncertainty on the part of both elements in the relationship. And lurking, too, in the background is a rightward-moving Administration that is pledged to getting the government out of our lives. But with voluminous health statistics showing that self-induced afflictions — from smoking, alcoholism, improper nutrition, and automobile accidents — are both prevalent and mainly beyond the reach of therapeutic medicine, the interest in prevention has inevitably focused attention on developing techniques to save people from themselves.

As a result, the social and behavioral sciences are aquiver with the prospect of new money but they are also hearing from within their ranks warnings of the disenchantment that may follow if they raise expectations that they cannot fulfill. Nevertheless, official Washington tends to proceed from the assumption that money can buy results in research and it is apparent that the buyers are out there.

With "health promotion" being the key term, a Washington audience last month sympathetically listened to one of the most influential apostles of the new theme, Canada's Minister of Health and Welfare, Marc Lalonde, who told the annual meeting of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) that scientific caution can be an impediment to progress. While caution and skepticism are essential to research, he said, "messages to influence the public must be loud, clear, and unequivocal."

Social Science Report

As a follow-up to Canada's program of universal health insurance, he said, his country is devising a health strategy to reach the well, rather than the sick; the result, Lalonde said, will resemble a "cultural revolution much more than an administrative reform."

Lalonde's strategy is outlined in an analysis issued last year, *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians* (74 pages, no charge, Health and Welfare Canada, Brooke Claxton Building, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada). The document, which has become "must" reading among US health planners, takes the position that Canada must now concentrate its health spending outside the traditional medical system.

Lalonde divided health into four broad elements: the health delivery system, lifestyle, environment, and human biology. Until now, he said, Canada has emphasized the first element, But after a point, medical care alone will not have significant effects on major killers and causes of disability — automobile and other accidents, heart and respiratory disease, and suicide.

Self-imposed risks, bad habits and environmental hazards, he continued, underlie "each of the five major causes of death between age one and age seventy, and one can only conclude that, unless the environment is changed and the self-imposed risks are reduced, the death rates will not be significantly improved," and neither will the quality of life.

If that premise is to be followed, Lalonde told the IOM, Canada must address the issues of trying to modify individual behavior and lifestyle patterns and the social and economic systems that have a powerful influence on individuals.

The receptiveness of US health planners to this line of thinking is reflected in the latest version of the *For-*

(Continued on Page 5)

PUBLIC INTEREST *(Continued from Page 3)*

the regulatory agencies.

Kennedy's Judiciary subcommittee on administrative practice and procedure is planning to hold hearings on the measure in January. It has also been referred to the Senate Government Operations Committee, whose chairman, Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.) is a cosponsor.

Last month, the House of Representatives passed a bill to establish a Consumer Protection Agency (CPA), a measure long advocated by public interest groups to increase public participation in government decision-making. But the bill scraped through by only 9 votes, and with a Presidential veto promised, there is little chance that it will be enacted. If the CPA proposal dies, Kennedy's bill is likely to gain considerable impetus as a less ambitious alternative.

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering whether or not to provide assistance on its own to intervenors in its regulatory procedures. Earlier this year it awarded a contract to the Washington law firm of Boasberg, Hewes, Klores and Kass to investigate the matter (SGR Vol. V, No. 9). The study didn't offer any recommendations, but found no legal impediment to the award of attorneys fees by NRC, and presented the arguments for and against. NRC sent the study out for comments, and has not yet made a final determination.

. . . But with Cautions Against Excessive Expectations

(Continued from Page 4)

ward Plan for Health FY 1977-81, issued in September by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (SGR Vol. V, No. 16). Though the Lalonde document is not referred to in the *Forward Plan,* HEW officials readily acknowledge that they cribbed from it generously in preparing their own work. And, in a meeting last month of the Coalition for Health Funding, a Washington-based association of health-related organizations that depend heavily on government support, HEW's Director of Health Policy and Planning, Harry Cain, underscored the importance of Lalonde's message. HEW's stance, he suggested, is that the Department agrees on the need for a major thrust in prevention, but it simply doesn't know what to do about it.

Meanwhile, the National Cancer Institute and the National Heart and Lung Institute have sponsored separate conferences this year to collect information on behavioral research relevant to their missions. Officials of both Institutes indicate that they are putting more support into such research. Both meetings explored epidemiological and psychosocial factors in disease, coping behavior, patient compliance in therapy and a host of other related topics.

While the proceedings of the Cancer Institute conference are still in the works, the Heart and Lung Institute has issued a 300-page report of its conference (copies available without charge from Stephen Weiss, National Heart and Lung Institute, Building 31, Room 5-A10, NIH, Bethesda, Md. 20014). The report provides a quick course on the extent to which behavioral and social factors impinge on health — and the uncertainties that exist on how to deal with them.

The keynoter at the conference, psychologist Neal Miller, voiced his concern about the emerging interest in health behavior. "The opportunity exists," he said, "for us to accelerate greatly a trend that has been occurring, namely the expansion of behavioral science from one area of mental health to a far broader area that could be described as behavioral medicine." But, he cautioned, "there is a danger of over-optimistic expectations, which may lead to disillusionment which could set the whole movement . . . back many years."

Miller said that with all the research that has been done, it is still hard to control even such common health problems as smoking and obesity, or to get people to take medicine for a disease that does not produce any symptoms of which they are aware. "Great needs do not necessarily define good areas of scientific application," he said.—PM

Still Another Study Hits at Agricultural Research

For the second time in three years, the agricultural research system in the United States has come under sharp attack from the National Academy of Sciences. Last month, in a report transmitted to President Ford, an Academy committee complained of "gross deficiencies" in research funding, of ineffective management within the Department of Agriculture, and a lack of clear direction in agricultural research policies.

Some of the charges are reminiscent of complaints raised in a blistering indictment of the quality of agricultural research by another Academy committee in December 1972 (SGR Vol. III, No. 1), but the latest report is milder in tone, and its criticisms are sweetened with a few words of praise for the system.

Prepared by the Academy's Board on Agriculture and Renewable Resources, a top-level committee chaired by Sylvan Wittwer of Michigan State University, the report is concerned with ways to improve domestic food production. Many of its criticisms and recommendation were incorporated into a second report, published simultaneously by the Academy, which presents some preliminary findings of a mammoth Academy study of ways in which agricultural research in the United States can help alleviate the world food crisis. That study is being conducted by a committee under the chairmanship of Harrison Brown of Caltech, a former Foreign Secretary of the Academy.

The Wittwer committee complained of insufficient attention to basic research, chiefly by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in recent years. "Fundamental research undergirding food production technology has languished for two decades," the committee states, and adds that "because of crop surpluses, political pressures from commodity groups, budgetary reductions and emphasis on immediately applicable results, a formerly substantial basic research effort in the Agricultural Research Service and the [State Agricultural Extension Service] virtually disappeared."

In particular, the committee suggests that research on nitrogen fixation is "grossly inadequate," that research on photosynthesis should at least be doubled,

(Continued on Page 6)

Peer Review: NSF, NIH Examine the System

Following a spate of criticisms of its grant review processes, and faced with a legislative proposal which would radically alter its operations, the National Science Foundation has launched two separate investigations of its peer-review system. And an internal committee of the National Institutes of Health is also deep into a study of NIH's grant awarding mechanisms to see whether they can be improved. The methods by which the federal government supports academic research have never before come under such intensive scrutiny.

The two studies of NSF's peer review system are proceeding from different directions. One, sponsored by the National Science Board (NSB), NSF's policy-making council, consists of a questionnaire, sent to some 3000 grant applicants and 1500 grant reviewers, which seeks to determine the attitudes of scientists toward the system. While the other, which is being carried out by the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Science and Public Policy (COSPUP) under contract to NSF, will attempt to examine the philosophy behind the peer-review system and assess its effectiveness.

The NSB's questionnaires, which were sent out last week, went to approximately equal numbers of successful and unsuccessful grant applicants. In addition to sounding out views on the effectiveness of the system and its drawbacks, the survey should help to determine how scientists would react to moves to make the peer review process more open.

One of the chief changes in the system advocated by NSF's detractors in Congress is that verbatim, signed copies of peer review reports should be made available to grant applicants on request. NSF has agreed to make the reports available, but not the names of reviewers. NSF officials insist that many scientists would be unwilling to review grant applications unless they are guaranteed anonymity, and they also argue that if confidentiality is not preserved, reviews would be less candid. At last the validity of those assumptions is being put to the test.

The returned questionnaires will be examined by the General Accounting Office, and the results should be available early next year, in time for Congressional review of NSF's budget request.

As for the COSPUP study, it will proceed in two phases, the first of which will consist of a detailed description of the system used by NSF, based on interviews with NSF officials and an analysis of a ran-

(Continued on Page 7)

AGRICULTURE *(Continued from Page 5)*

and that the overall research budget of the USDA and associated agencies should immediately be increased by 40 percent, from its present level of about $700 million. Such an increase, the committee asserts, is needed simply to restore the agriculture research budget to its 1966 level.

As for the management of the research effort, the committee suggests that the basic structure of the system — a loosely knit conglomeration of many federal, state and private institutions — has worked well, and should be retained. But some fundamental changes are nevertheless called for. For a start, the committee notes that "many agricultural research administrators are of the opinion that USDA has not been an effective proponent of agricultural research, that it does not now provide for an adequate consideration of the problems and needs of research in its top-level deliberations, and that it lacks administrative and budgeting arrangements that can effectively guide research in response to national needs."

The committee also asserts that "there is an urgent need for establishing national goals and policies in food and nutrition research," that a "more coherent overview" of the effort is required, and that there should be better review of grant proposals.

To remedy those deficiencies, the committee recommends a number of administrative changes, including the appointment of a top-level policy council, the designation of a senior USDA official to coordinate and manage the department's research effort, and the launching of a national study of state-supported agricultural research establishments.

But the chief recommendation, which also figured prominently in the previous Academy report on agricultural research, is that a substantial system of competitive grants should be established to support research projects at universities and colleges. Grant applications should be submitted to peer-review, like those submitted to NIH and NSF, the committee suggests.—CN

(The reports, *World Food and Nutrition Study; Enhancement of Food Production in the United States,* and *World Food and Nutrition Study; Interim Report,* are available from the NAS Printing and Publishing Office, 2101 constitution Avenue NW, Washington DC 20418, for $5.50 each.)

FDA Head Wants New Rules

In a little-noticed speech at Tulane University Medical School last month, Alexander Schmidt, the besieged Administrator of the Food and Drug Administration, offered the surprising proposal that FDA's drug review process should be opened up to public inspection.

The proposal is surprising in view of the fact the FDA has established a solid reputation for fending off public inquiries with every legal shield at its disposal. It has, for example, been taken to court on several occasions by public interest lawyers seeking information under the Freedom of Information Act, and recently, a District Court judge accused FDA of taking actions which are "tantamount to burying the type of deliberations which the Advisory Committee Act sought to bring to the light of day."

In his speech, Schmidt invited Congress to pass legislation declaring that data related to the safety and efficacy of new drugs should not be considered a trade secret, and therefore should be made public on request. Given such a legislative determination, "our discussions related to drug development could be conducted in public, as they should," Schmidt said. "Getting scientific data into the open, where it belongs, will, I think, help the public realize that, as a rule, drug development is not usually (sic) villainous," he added.

PEER REVIEW *(Continued from Page 6)*

dom sample of successful and unsuccessful applications. Among other factors, it will examine allocation of funds among scientific disciplines, how peer reviewers are chosen, and so on. It should be completed next Summer. The second phase will be concerned primarily with an assessment of how the results of NSF-supported research are used.

The NIH review of its granting mechanisms was launched last summer by De Witt Stetten, then acting NIH Director. It is being conducted by an internal committee, consisting of NIH officials, headed by Ruth Kirschstein, which has been assigned the task of making a broad assessment of the effectiveness, applicability and philosophy of NIH's peer review system. It is also examining the possibility of establishing a formal appeals mechanism for unsuccessful applicants, and looking into the effects of the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act on the system. Though it is an internal committee, it hopes to hold three public hearings—on the West Coast, in the Midwest and on the East Coast—in February, and it is seeking information from outside NIH. It is scheduled to report next June.

Executive Director for the study is Mathilde Solowey, Room 4A 52, Bldg 31, NIH, Bethesda, Md. 20014.—CN

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Opposition Mounts to Mid-East Nuclear Deal

Until the recent visit to the United States of Egypt's President Sadat, little had been publicly mentioned of former President Nixon's proposal to sell US nuclear reactors to Egypt and Israel. For the past 18 months, however, the State Department has been trying to negotiate the precise details of formal agreements covering the deals, and it is now hoping to complete the negotiations early next year. Congress will then have 60 days to accept or reject the arrangements.

Strong Congressional opposition can be anticipated, and opening shots have already been fired. Last week, Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), a liberal gadfly on defense and atomic energy matters, accused the Ford Administration of "caving in" to Egyptian demands by offering a concession on safeguards against nuclear materials being diverted from Egypt's power program into the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Aspin asserted that Sadat was given an assurance during his Washington visit that safeguards negotiated as part of the deal will apply only to US-supplied reactors and equipment. Originally, the State Department had hoped to negotiate an agreement which would impose safeguards — such as international inspection rights — on all nuclear facilities in Egypt and Israel, no matter who supplied them.

By narrowing the negotiations only to the two 1300-MW reactors and associated equipment promised by Nixon, Aspin asserted that "the US is missing a golden opportunity to make sure that Egypt never secretly fabricates nuclear weapons."

A State Department official acknowledged that when the negotiations began, the US was hoping to conclude a deal under which safeguards would be applied to all nuclear facilities in Egypt and Israel, but the talks are now preceeding on the assumption that safeguards will apply only to US-supplied equipment.

Israel operates one small French-supplied reactor, which is not subject to safeguards, and which could, in theory, supply small qualities of plutonium for manufacturing nuclear weapons. Israel reportedly refused to allow that reactor to be tied in with the negotiations, and Egypt then refused to accept comprehensive safeguards over its nuclear power program. It now operates one small Soviet-supplied research reactor.

No matter how stringent the safeguards applied to the US equipment in the proposed deal, there is thus likely to be a fight in Congress over how far they should be applied. The State Department hopes to conclude negotiations with Israel and Egypt at about the same time, after which the proposed agreements will be sent to Congress. The Joint committee on Atomic Energy will then have 30 days to pass judgment on them, and the full Congress will then have another 30 days to decide whether to accept or reject the terms.

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